565 merchants and middle peasants were socially compatible; the social distinction between a craftsman and a simple peasant was even more difficult to draw, and bureaucrats were often wealthy landlords as well. Thus, if we employ the term "social classes" to mean the stratification of society on an economic basis, we will find that class lines cut across the traditionally accepted occupation-status classification.

• 556 However, members of all the occupational groups regarded the possession of land as the true indication of prestige and security. A landless peasant hoped to possess land, a peasant with some land hoped to acquire more, and the wealthiest landlord wished to do likewise. Artisans who had acquired savings would invest them in land. Merchants invariably put excess capital that might have been used for business expansion into land, although often they did not rely on the income from it as their principal means of support. Bureaucrats were even more preoccupied with owning land concomitant with their rise in officialdom. This is a common phenomenon in any society where other tangible assets for accumulation are lacking.

Although the possession of land was a criterion for determining prestige and, to a large extent, the sign of real power, prestige did not always result from wealth and the land-holdings of any one family seldom remained constant for more than two or three

1:Stanford U. S-4, 5 1956 AF15 East China
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generations.[3] These conditions accounted for the lack of a permanent ruling caste in China. There are definite ideals in traditional Chinese culture which conditioned the upward and downward mobility of the people within the social hierarchy.

B. Social Mobility

The family ideal. Large families, especially of the extended type, were the ideal in China.[4] However, in practice the ideal was limited by economic means. Primogeniture in China had been done away with long before the Manchu Dynasty (1644-1912). Land was divided equally among sons. After successive divisions, individual holdings became infinitesimally small. This contributed to the decline of the economic status of even the wealthiest families, particularly when land was the sole source of income.[5] On the other

3. Martin Yang, A Chinese Village, New York, 1945, p. 132; Francis Hsu, Under the Ancestors' Shadow, New York, Columbia University Press, 1948, p. 4.

4. Consult the chapter on The Family in this handbook.

5. "In the matter of inheritance, the general pattern observed for poor agriculturalists holds very well for the merchant group. Just as at the death of a farmer, there is a sharing of the property. In the agricultural situation, however, there seems to be greater fragmentation of the legacy, each son working his share more or less independently and with a minimum of combination.
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